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Is the ‘hybrid turn’ a ‘spatial turn’? A geographical perspective on hybridity and state-formation in the Western Pacific

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ABSTRACT
Our point of departure is the emerging critique of the problematic treatment of scale across various disciplinary engagements with hybridity. Adopting an overarching state-formation perspective, we extend this geographical critique by combining the sociospatial lenses of scale and territory in an analysis of one of the primary animators of political economic change and contestation in post-colonial Melanesia: extractive resource capitalism. Focusing on the Solomons Group of islands, we examine two spatial phenomena at the core of the contentious and frequently violent politics of extraction animating processes of state-formation in these settings: the social and historical production of islands as a scale/territory of violent struggle; and the emergence of the ‘ideology of customary landownership’ as a territorialising and exclusionary project that also has salient scalar dimensions. While these phenomena illustrate the inadequacy of hybridity’s crude spatial ontology, they also demonstrate how hybridity perspectives can play a role in achieving ‘thick description’ of the complex interactions involved in spatialised political economic processes. We conclude by sketching out some agendas for research on the political economy of resource extraction – and, more broadly, state-formation – in the western Pacific that combine spatial perspectives with those of the critical hybridity literature across various social science fields.

Introduction
E.W. Soja heralded the spatial turn in humanities and social sciences as ‘one of the most important intellectual developments in the late twentieth century’. Almost two decades later, this spatial turn, or, more accurately, series of spatial turns, has resulted in much conceptual overextension, slippage, and imprecision as sociospatial concepts have been increasingly deployed across the social sciences and applied to an ever growing list of social phenomena. Moreover, in some fields of inquiry the adoption of spatial thinking has been unstated and unreflexive; geographical and spatial assumptions have been adopted uncritically and without explication. Building upon an earlier essay, we suggest here that the concept of hybridity as it has been developed in a number of cognate fields of study, most...
recently in critical perspectives on state-building and intervention, has fallen into precisely this trap. Whether deployed in post-colonial studies, development studies, socio-legal studies, or international relations, we suggest that the concept of hybridity has been animated by a spatial ontology that has remained largely invisible and, therefore, under-theorised and deeply problematic. In this article, our primary aim is to deepen and extend an emerging geographical or sociospatial critique of the concept of hybridity by asking whether it provides a useful analytical lens on processes of state-formation.

In most of the fields of social scientific inquiry in which hybridity has been deployed, it has been seen as a useful heuristic for grappling with real-world phenomena that in one way or another entail the interpenetration of ‘local’, indigenous or place-specific socio-legal, political, or economic orders on the one hand, with global, transnational, or foreign orders on the other. In this sense, the concept of scale, particularly the ‘politics of scale’, is an especially salient and problematic lacuna in social scientific treatments of hybridity, as we (and others) have recently observed in relation to the critical literature on state-building and intervention. However, we are also conscious of not jettisoning one form of conceptual privileging (hybridity) only to replace it with another (the politics of scale). Indeed, as we suggested in our earlier essay, scalar dynamics have critical historical, social, and cultural inflections: the politics of scale plays out differently in different social, political, and ecological milieux, an insight that is now familiar from scholarship on the political ecology of violence. In this sense then, we think that hybridity, to the extent that it foregrounds the unique, dynamic, and contingent socio-economic and socio-political forms that emerge in particular contexts, remains a useful heuristic, amongst others, for understanding complex real-world phenomena including state-formation in fragmented post-colonial settings, the focus of our present study.

With de Guevara and others, we see state-formation as a predominantly organic, contingent, and highly contested historical process whose outcome, in the words of Berman and Lonsdale, is ‘a largely unconscious and contradictory process of conflicts, negotiations and compromises between diverse groups’. This can be contrasted with state-building that is viewed as purposeful actions aimed at constructing the institutional apparatus of centralised control. The latter, which tends to dominate policy discussions and some areas of academic debate, is often framed as a linear, technical, and largely ahistorical project with a significant focus on the role of international actors. The distinction between state-building and state-formation has pertinent parallels with Foster’s contrast between nation-building and nation-making in post-colonial Melanesia. The former is seen as the exclusive purview of political elites, supported by international actors, whose task it is to assemble the elements of a modern state and to construct a sense of national identity; while the latter is seen as a process of continuous organic dialogue involving a plurality of actors, including at the sub-national scale, who produce and disseminate competing constructions of the nation.

In keeping with the spatial sensibilities that inform our analysis, we see political economic contestation frequently taking on salient spatial manifestations. This is especially true in the case of extractive resource capitalism, which, as we shall see, is the primary animator of political and economic struggle in the case studies that we examine here. Extractive resource capitalism can usefully be interpreted as a form of ‘foreign’ intervention, sharing a number of characteristics with contemporary state-building and development interventions. Indeed, the social and political economic impacts of large-scale extractive projects in regions of limited statehood are often as transformative at multiple scales as those of international
state-building interventions, if not more so. This is explicitly recognised in scholarship that sees a direct link between the contentious and frequently violent politics of resource extraction and processes of state-formation: ‘… analogies might be drawn with historical experiences in which conflict has been associated with the emergence of more inclusive public institutions that – were it not for the conflict – would never have been created’.

Our empirical focus is upon the western Pacific, the culture area of Melanesia, and, in particular, the region known to geographers as the Solomons Group of islands consisting of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (part of Papua New Guinea – PNG) and the post-colonial nation of Solomon Islands. Each of us has conducted extensive field research in the Solomons Group over the past decade or so, from which we draw our empirical material. We will suggest that this region’s archipelagic geography in concert with its well-known ethno-linguistic diversity, its ‘Melanesian’ forms of social and power relations, its colonial history, its uneven penetration by successive waves of globalisation, and its recent experience with armed conflict and international intervention, makes it especially productive for a geographical critique of the concept of hybridity. Moreover, Bougainville has featured prominently in the most recent field of studies to adopt hybridity as an analytical lens – critical perspectives on state-building and intervention – where it has been characterised as a quintessential example of a ‘hybrid political order’ and a ‘liberal-local hybrid’. Hybridity has also been used heuristically in other areas of study in Melanesia. This includes socio-legal research in Solomon Islands investigating the complex ways in which ‘traditional’ and ‘state’ forms of authority overlap and intersect. Again, our purpose is not to reject these sorts of interpretations of hybridity, but rather to nuance them by highlighting some of their geographical blind spots.

Given our overarching interest in grappling with the processes of state-formation that are unfolding in this part of Island Melanesia, we take as our focus one of the region’s primary animators of political-economic change and intensive contestation: extractive resource capitalism. As has been the case in other contexts, notably in parts of Africa, the advent of extractive resource industries in the Solomons Group and in neighbouring PNG, and their economic primacy over the past several decades, has produced a contentious politics that is fundamentally spatialised and frequently violent. These contestations have given rise to a plethora of new institutional arrangements that represent important developments in the ‘long-haul’ of state-formation. However, as our primary focus is upon understanding the nature of contestation over resource extraction, a full review of these institutional developments is beyond the scope of this article, though we do briefly outline some of the most significant ones.

We train our analysis on two spatial phenomena that lie at the core of the contentious politics of resource extraction in the Solomons Group of islands: the social and historical production of islands as a scale/territory of violent struggle in the context of colonisation and successive waves of globalisation under capitalism; and the emergence of the ‘ideology of customary landownership’ as a territorialising and exclusionary project, the corrosive and disintegrative effects of which can only be properly understood with reference to Melanesian conceptions of sociality. In taking up the challenge of engaging in ‘a genuinely polymorphic mode of sociospatial analysis’, in both cases we foreground territoriality and the politics of scale. In a longer and more comprehensive treatment we could also productively engage other key sociospatial lenses, notably place and networks. However, we believe...
that scale and territory are the most apposite dimensions of spatiality in these cases and are sufficient to achieve a significant degree of analytical insight and ‘thick description’.

In the first part of the article we briefly introduce the concept of hybridity as it has been developed and deployed across several cognate fields of social inquiry, emphasising its problematic spatial ontology, before turning to an overview of the two spatial concepts that we engage in our analysis. We then provide a brief description of the geographical, historical, social, and political-economic context of the Solomons Group of islands, including a short review of the conflict and instability that has recently characterised the region. This is followed by a discussion of the two phenomena introduced above in which we demonstrate how neither hybridity nor any single sociospatial lens is sufficient, on its own, to achieve analytical rigour. We then conclude with some reflections on space and state-formation in post-colonial Melanesia and on how the hybridity literature might adopt a more geographical sensibility, and, more broadly, what that might mean for the future of hybridity as a ‘travelling concept’.

The hybrid turn: hybridity across disciplinary boundaries

Hybridity has acquired its current prominence in the burgeoning critiques of liberal peace and international state-building interventions. This should not, however, blind us to its much longer history in Western social and political thought, or of the ways in which the concept has regularly traversed disciplinary boundaries.

In its literal sense, the term ‘hybrid’ originated in the biological sciences and was used to describe the outcome of a process of mixing or combining of different elements. Its most controversial usage involved its appropriation in Victorian times by proponents of pseudo-scientific theories of race. Hybridity has subsequently appeared in different guises across various fields of social science and areas of policy discourse.

It has been an important concept in cultural and post-colonial studies where it was used to highlight processes of interaction between colonial and colonised or subaltern subjects. Homi Bhabha, a leading post-colonial theorist, deployed hybridity to challenge hegemonic depictions of colonial domination and emphasise agency and resistance on the part of subaltern subjects. Other scholars in the post-colonial tradition have used the concept to examine how new transcultural forms emerged in the ‘contact zone’ created by colonialism.

As a way of denoting the processes and outcomes of interactions between social, political, and other institutional orders in colonial and post-colonial settings, hybridity is a notion that informs various fields of scholarship, even where the term itself is absent or another is used. For example, legal anthropologists have developed the sub-field of ‘legal pluralism’ to study encounters between different socio-legal orders resulting from historical processes of colonial and post-colonial globalisation.

The notion of hybridity has also acquired currency in development studies, often as a way of unsettling state-centric perspectives and highlighting the role of informal institutions and non-state actors in areas of governance and service delivery, including justice and security, in many parts the global south. Development practitioners have also used hybridity as part of a growing critique of unilinear processes of institutional transfer as a major modality of donor-funded reform in the global south. In this vein, the 2011 World Development
Report on Conflict, Security and Development called for ‘best fit’ approaches to institutional development, drawing on ‘combinations of state, private sector, faith based, traditional, and community structures for service delivery’.24

Hybridity has been taken up most recently as part of the broader critique of liberal peace and state-building interventionism. The hybrid critique accounts for the failures of the liberal peace in terms of the fundamental incompatibility between the liberal institutions it promotes, primarily through state-building, and the socio-political and normative orders in the local contexts of intervention. With its focus on interactions between ‘the global’ and ‘the local’, it critiques the top–down and formulaic character of liberal state-building interventions in the global South, and, instead, highlights the hybrid formations of liberal and non-liberal institutions and values flowing from such encounters.25

Hybridity’s attempt to overcome enduring and unhelpful binaries is an obvious source of its appeal, although the extent to which it succeeds in doing so remains open to question. The concept’s emphasis on the role of agency in shaping and mediating processes of social and political change is another strength. It also appears to lend itself to a more accurate and context-specific exploration of the interplay between social and institutional forms in ‘hybrid political orders’ and the messy realities of post-colonial state-formation.26 While we find heuristic value in the concept, we share many of the concerns raised by critics. A recurring criticism has been its unproblematic treatment of issues of power and politics in the interactions between the international and the local, as well as how power dynamics play out within each of these broad categories. These and other criticisms serve to highlight hybridity’s neglect of larger issues of political economy and their critical role in post-colonial state-formation.

The focus of our own critique is squarely on the problematic spatial ontology of hybridity as used across different areas of social science and, in particular, its crude, homogenising, and dichotomised treatment of ‘local’ and ‘international’ scales. In our view, there is a clear need to move beyond unhelpful scalar binaries such as ‘local-supranational’ or ‘local-liberal’ in order to adequately engage with the hierarchies of power that animate the interactions between these, and other, scales. In emphasising the importance of scalar analysis, we draw attention to sub-national scales of social, political, and territorial organisation that are frequently overlooked in the hybridity discourse. In doing so, we also seek to highlight the various ways in which ongoing processes of state-formation in Solomon Islands and Bougainville have entailed the rescaling of power, including the production of new scales, in the context of successive phases of political struggle that in recent years have been animated by globalised natural resource capitalism. Moreover, we extend and deepen our spatial critique by also considering territoriality, alongside scale, as another salient dimension of the contentious politics of extractive resource capitalism.

**Sociospatial relations**

At this juncture it is necessary to briefly define what we mean by the terms scale and territory, highlighting, in particular, how both of these dimensions of spatiality are deployed as strategies in the political economic struggles that have attended globalisation under capitalism. Our point of departure is an encompassing view of space and spatiality, derived from the work of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, as ‘actively produced and as an active moment within the social process’.27 For Harvey, and others working in the historical materialist
tradition, space (and its four constituent socio-spatial dimensions – territory, place, scale, and networks) is, above all, produced by capitalist social relations and the contradictory logics of capitalist accumulation. The interactions between space and social relations are inherently dynamic as space is constantly configured and reconfigured through social and political economic processes and struggles.

Neil Smith coined the phrase ‘politics of scale’, which has become shorthand for the proposition that scale is socially produced and constantly reconfigured through socio-political struggle. Scale theorists see relationality and hierarchy as the key defining characteristics of the politics of scale and also emphasise its strategic dimensions: scalar politics are seen as being deployed strategically by a range of actors in political power struggles. Scale in this sense is not socially or politically neutral; it is ‘both the result and the outcome of social struggle for power and control’. It is also recognised that scalar struggles and contestations can give rise to new – sometimes previously unimaginable – scales, while the relative importance of existing scales is reconfigured.

Turning to territory, globalisation has deeply unsettled the Westphalian nexus of national territory and state sovereignty. Scholars have become acutely aware of the dangers of ‘territorial traps’ and ‘methodological territorialism’; the assumption that the apparently fixed and natural boundaries of territory are conterminous with those of social units. It has also become accepted that actors other than state can engage in processes of territorialisation, and that these processes can occur at the sub-national level. Moreover, as is the case with the politics of scale, territory has come to be associated with a strategy predicated upon the enclosure and control of geographical space; a strategy that is often referred to as territoriality.

An important perspective on both territoriality and the politics of scale comes from research on the geography of globalisation and urbanisation that has drawn attention to the ‘spatial fixes’, and corollary processes of de- and re-territorialisation, that have characterised capitalist accumulation in the current round of globalisation. In articulating his theory of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, David Harvey singles out resource rich sites as important sites of capitalism’s ‘spatial strategies’; while other scholars have demonstrated that struggles over mineral-resource extraction are, in essence, struggles over scale. These spatial strategies, which have both territorial and scalar dimensions, are pertinent to our discussion because of the centrality of extractive resource industries to political economic contestation and violence in both Bougainville and Solomon Islands.

The Solomons group

The Solomons Group of islands, which includes both territories, possesses the extraordinary ethno-linguistic diversity that is characteristic of Melanesia. Twenty-five languages are spoken by Bougainville’s estimated population of between 300,000 and 350,000, and 80 languages spoken by Solomon Islands population of around 500,000. Most of the inhabitants of these islands continue to live in rural areas where contemporary forms of ‘community’ are based on kinship and exchange relations, neo-traditional governance structures, membership of Christian churches, and myriad claims to customary land of which genealogical descent is only one. Intense social diversity, geographical fragmentation, and a widely dispersed population have long problematised the extension of centralised authority throughout this archipelagic region.
Solomon Islands was a British protectorate, gaining independence in 1978; while Bougainville was initially colonised by Germany and later became part of the Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea which gained independence as Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1975. The evolving post-colonial political settlements in both PNG and Solomon Islands have been characterised by long-standing tensions and debates about political devolution and decentralisation; debates in which islands and clusters of islands have played a central role.

The late colonial periods of both PNG and Solomon Islands were characterised by an efflorescence of sub-national socio-political movements – described in the case of PNG as ‘micronationalist movements’ – all of which were seeking some form of local autonomy, explicitly associated, in most cases, with a particular territory. Some of these movements were primarily concerned with political resistance, while others were seeking a return to self-sufficiency. For many of them, however, issues of access to, and control over, land and natural resources were high on their agendas.

This was true of the Moro Movement on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, for example, which has long opposed large-scale gold mining and the control of the state in matters of land and resources. And it also applies to Bougainville’s leaders’ threats of secession, on the eve of PNG’s independence, if their demands for a larger share of revenue from the island’s giant Panguna mine were not met. Bougainville’s subsequent unilateral declaration of independence forced the pre-independence government to adopt constitutionally enshrined decentralisation arrangements for PNG’s 19 provinces.

During the post-colonial period, a key dimension of these spatialised political economic dynamics has been the evisceration of provincial governments and, in the case of Solomons Islands, local-level governments. In PNG, this occurred under the guise of decentralisation reforms in the mid-1990s that removed elected political representation at the provincial level. In the case of Solomon Islands, local-level governments were effectively abolished as part of a structural adjustment programme in the late 1990s and provincial governments have been slowly immiserated due to perennial under-funding by the national government. At the same time, however, there has been an exponential expansion, in both PNG and Solomon Islands, of so-called discretionary funds at the disposal of individual national Members of Parliament (MPs). It has been estimated that Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), as they are known in Solomon Islands, now dwarf national government grants to the provinces by a factor of six.

In the case of Solomon Islands, some observers have interpreted the latter development as indicative of a fundamental reordering of power over the past few decades. However, this re-ordering could also be seen as a form of rescaling and re-territorialisation: the consolidation of power in the hands of national-level political elites through the channelling of resources directly into (territorially bounded) national constituencies. In the case of Bougainville, the continuing existence of four national (PNG) MPs with significant financial resources at their disposal contributes in critical ways to the problematic and contingent character of Bougainville’s autonomy.

**The Bougainville Crisis**

While the Bougainville Crisis occurred against the backdrop of a distinctive sense of Bougainvillean identity (see below), most informed commentators would agree that the
conflict would not have occurred were it not for multi-scalar grievances and tensions associated with the Panguna mine, then one of the world’s largest copper mines. As noted above, grievances over the Panguna benefit-sharing arrangements were a critical factor in Bougainville’s attempted secession from PNG in 1975. From the mid-1980s, these benefit-sharing tensions intensified, as did the negative social impacts of the economic benefits themselves. The grievances found voice in a rival mine-lease landowners’ association, led by a younger generation of landowners who challenged the authority of the existing association, and eventually set about sabotaging the mine’s power supply. The heavy-handed response of PNG security forces led to a rapid intensification of the conflict and its continued escalation saw it become increasingly secessionist in character, culminating in a unilateral declaration of Bougainville independence by Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) leader Francis Ona in 1990.

Cleavages within the BRA intensified as the conflict progressed and a rival militant group emerged with the backing of the PNG Defence Force. Internal conflicts ensued that were often highly localised in nature, involving long-standing disputes over issues such as land (Regan 2014:24). A peace process that commenced in 1997 culminated in the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) in 2001 which granted autonomy to Bougainville, but deferred the question of full independence to a future referendum that must be held between 2015 and 2020 and is currently scheduled for 2019.

Solomon Islands

The Ethnic Tension was centred on the island of Guadalcanal, which hosts the capital Honiara, and saw the mobilisation of two of the archipelagic nation’s largest island-scale identities, those of Guadalcanal and the neighbouring island of Malaita. The conflict had its roots in long-standing patterns of uneven economic development and corollary processes of internal migration and settlement; a gradual breakdown in government service provision during the post-colonial period; localised intra-group conflict on north Guadalcanal over access to and control over land and the economic benefits of resource industries, including the Gold Ridge mine and the nation’s only commercial oil palm operation; the socio-economic marginalisation of the south coast of Guadalcanal, the ‘Weather Coast’, home to most of the Guale (meaning a person ‘indigenous’ to Guadalcanal) militant leaders; and long-standing calls for greater autonomy for Guadalcanal Province under a new federal constitution, driven in large part by the desire to capture a ‘fairer share’ of the island’s natural resource wealth. The immediate trigger for the conflict was the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis, and subsequent structural adjustment reforms, on patronage networks including those associated with the notoriously corrupt logging industry which has been the mainstay of the economy since the 1980s.

During the early stages of the conflict, around 35,000 migrant settlers in rural areas of north Guadalcanal, most of who originated from the island of Malaita, were violently evicted by Guale militants. A rival Malaitan militant group emerged, joined with the Malaitan-dominated paramilitary arm of the police force, and staged a coup d’état in June 2000. The open conflict between militant groups ended with the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000. However, the country remained militarised and there was significant in-fighting amongst the formerly united Guale militants, especially on the Weather Coast. The violence continued until the deployment of the Australian-led Regional Assistance...
Mission to Solomon Islands in July 2003, which brought about a rapid restoration of law and order.

Two key spatial dimensions of the contentious politics of resource extraction

Islands as scale/territory in political economic struggles

One of us has recently argued that, in the context of the Solomons Group of islands, ‘islandness’ has emerged as a critical factor at particular moments and conjunctures of political economic struggle, most recently around globalised extractive resource capitalism. By ‘islandness’ we stress not only the unique territorial properties of islands that renders them paradigmatic settings for territorialising projects such as the nation-state and sub-national jurisdictions of various types, a point that has been well made in the ‘island studies’ literature; but also the social and historical production of islands as a scale of struggle in the contentious politics of scale that have characterised successive rounds of globalisation under capitalism. In this sense, we see in islands such as Guadalcanal and Bougainville a ‘coproduction of scale and territory that is uniquely, though problematically possible…they can become exceptionally potent and violent arenas for the struggles that attend extractive resource capitalism.’

In the Melanesian context, we interpret the emergence of island-scale identities and socio-political movements as a product of experience and struggle associated with the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism. These struggles united the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous populations of the large Melanesian islands in ways that were previously unknown while simultaneously producing the island as a scale of political struggle. In the case of Bougainville, despite its ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, a distinct pan-Bougainville identity developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Bougainvilleans interacted more intensively with ‘other’ Papua New Guineans in the colonial plantation economy. Similarly on Guadalcanal, an island-scale identity emerged in the milieu of the plantation economy from the early twentieth century and solidified in the context of post-Second World War migration, especially of Malaitans, to Honiara and adjacent peri-urban and rural areas. The emergence of ethno-political and ‘ethno-territorial’ agendas associated with island-scale identities has also had much to do with the legacy of colonial cartographies. In the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, for example, large islands and clusters of smaller ones became ‘districts’ for the purposes of colonial administration and later became provinces within the unitary nation-state of Solomon Islands.

This nexus of scale, territory, islandness, and violence has been turbo-charged by the advent of extractive resource industries, animated, in large part, by the scalar tensions around the distribution of costs and benefits that are intrinsic to large-scale extractive projects. As we have seen, getting a larger, or ‘fairer’, share of the benefits from extractive resource industries was a key issue in the conflicts in both Bougainville and Guadalcanal, and it remains much disputed in both contexts. In this sense, then, one of the most critical post-colonial political dynamics in the Solomons Group – tensions around devolution and autonomy in the context of natural resource extraction – is best understood with reference to two forms of sociospatiality, territoriality, and the politics of scale, both of which are largely absent in hybridity perspectives on social and political economic change.
Critically, however, these spatial dynamics have been explicitly recognised by local policy-makers and have directly informed post-conflict institutional arrangements in relation to large-scale mining in both Bougainville and Solomon Islands. In the case of the former, the Bougainville Peace Agreement effectively ceded full control over mining to the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG). The mining power is one of the first to have been drawn down under the autonomy arrangements and the recently adopted Bougainville Mining Act (2015), one of the first major pieces of legislation to be enacted by the ABG, has established the exclusive authority of ABG to allocate mining rights. The Act’s benefit-sharing provisions reflect an explicit recognition of the ways in which the unique geographical and territorial properties of islands can produce spatial patterns of uneven development can be accentuated by large-scale extractive projects and can potentially lead to conflict; again one of the lessons learned from the role of the Panguna mine in the origins of the Crisis. In the case of Solomon Islands, a new national mining framework, recently endorsed by cabinet following a major policy review, promises to address the marginalisation of provincial governments in the mineral development process and, as with the new arrangements on Bougainville, also explicitly recognises some of the unique challenges involved in large-scale mining in island contexts.

Despite its blind spots, we suggest hybridity still offers some important insights on these dynamics. Indeed, as we discussed in our earlier essay that engaged with data from Solomon Islands, there are, in that context, a plethora of island-provincial scale socio-political institutions that merge elements of church, state, and traditional or neo-traditional forms of governance and authority. Some of these hybrid governance structures are playing a very active role in contemporary policy debates about large-scale mining in the wider context of on-going tensions around devolution and the adoption of a federal system of government that would grant provincial governments greater powers, including in relation to extractive industries. In the case of Guadalcanal, a question raised by the first author with several senior Guale leaders (including ‘paramount chiefs’ and national and provincial politicians) in early 2015 about the future of the Gold Ridge mine quickly morphed into a discussion about inter-governmental benefit-sharing arrangements and greater autonomy for Guadalcanal under new federal constitutional arrangements. In this manner, island-scale hybrid governance structures are emerging as important actors in the scalar and territorial politics of resource extraction.

**The ideology of customary landownership**

Another critical dimension of the contentious, spatialised, politics that have characterised the advent of extractive resource industries in post-colonial Melanesia is the emergence of a pervasive ‘ideology of customary landownership’. This ideology asserts that customary groups – commonly described as ‘clans’ – and land groups are coterminous, and that ‘these customary landowning groups’ are the basic building blocks of Melanesian societies. The ethnographic realities are, of course, far more complex: individuals may belong to more than one ‘customary group’, and any given ‘land group’ may contain members who are not part of the local ‘customary group’, especially when the latter is narrowly defined in terms of unilineal descent. For these reasons, the ideology of customary landownership can be interpreted as a classic ‘territorial trap’.
It is, however, an ideology that has suited the agendas of different actors at different scales in the political economy of resource extraction, but especially powerful local ‘customary’ leaders, invariably senior men, who have exploited it in order to capture the various economic benefits – including rents, royalties, and compensation payments – that flow from extractive projects. In doing so, they have excluded other members of their groups from accessing these benefits, a process that has been extraordinarily disintegrative and corrosive in the context of Melanesian sociocultural norms of reciprocity, obligation, and distribution. Indeed, intra-group contestation of this nature was a critical factor in origins of the conflicts in Bougainville and Guadalcanal, where, in both cases, the politics of exclusion had a salient and volatile inter-generational dimension ‘with the younger generation of (dispossessed) landowners coming to blame their fathers for squandering their “birthright”, be it in the form of land itself or the resource rents that are associated with it’.60

We suggest that the ideology of customary landownership is, in many respects, a quintessential example of the social production of space in the context of struggles over capitalist accumulation, in this case, extractive resource capitalism. Once again, the sociospatial lenses of territory and scale provide critical analytical insights. The ideology of customary landownership is, self-evidently, a territorialising strategy. Indeed, it is arguably engendering a profound re-territorialisation of post-colonial Melanesia as the customary landowning group is increasingly seen as the most fundamental unit of political and territorial organisation. This has produced a remarkable proliferation of various types of legal entities that have the effect of fixing customary groups to particular territories. In PNG, for example, the number of Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) registered with the Department of Lands increased from 700 in 1995 to an estimated 17,000 in 2010.61

However, there are also important scalar dynamics at play here. Recalling that struggles over extractive resource industries are, quintessentially, struggles over scale, customary landownership emerges as a scale that is set in relation to, and contestation with, other scales – island/province, national, global – in a scalar hierarchy.62 As the economic importance of extractive resource industries has grown, so too has the discursive and material power of ‘customary landowners’ vis a vis actors at higher scales (i.e. sub-national and national governments and multinational corporations). In this manner, just as the ideology of customary landownership is driving re-territorialisation, so too is it contributing to a re-scaling of the political economies of resource extraction. Yet, once again, we suggest that these critical dynamics are largely invisible when seen through the lens of hybridity.

They have not, however, been overlooked by the architects of the new Bougainville Mining Act which vests both mineral ownership and full veto rights in relation to mineral exploitation in customary landowners, again demonstrating the extent to which the spatial dimensions of the contentious politics of large-scale mining on Bougainville have been explicitly recognised by local policy-makers and could be said to have given rise to new institutional arrangements that are more inclusive, and, potentially, more durable. Another example of this in the new Act is the Mineral Resource Forum, which is modelled on the Development Forum that emerged against the backdrop of the Panguna benefit-sharing tensions and has been an important feature of PNG’s mining sector for the past several decades. It has granted a wider range of sub-national stakeholders, including landowners and provincial governments, a place at the table in the negotiation of mining agreements through which they have been able to access a raft of economic benefits. The new mining policy framework in Solomon Islands proposes similar arrangements and generally gives much greater emphasis to
engaging landowners throughout the mineral development process. In both places, the new institutional arrangements have been informed by a clear understanding of the spatial dimensions of the contentious politics of resource access and control that the previous institutional arrangements were unable to peacefully contain.

As we argued in the case of the social production of islands as a scale of struggle, while hybridity has some notable spatial blind spots, it nevertheless offers some important insights into the emergence and rapid ascendency of the ideology of customary landownership. Indeed, as well as being an increasingly powerful and pervasive discursive identity, ‘customary landownership’ is a socio-legal category that is firmly moored in the pluralistic legislative and constitutional arrangements that govern land tenure in post-colonial Melanesia. This has its origins in the late colonial period when ‘custom’ was constructed as a key concept in ‘modern’ national law and was subsequently enshrined in the preambles of the constitutions of both PNG and Solomon Islands, and, more recently, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. These constitutions – in concert with other laws governing land and natural resources, including the new Bougainville Mining Act – have established ‘customary land’ as a powerful legal construct that enjoys primacy and inalienability. Hence, ‘custom’ and ‘customary land’ were enshrined in law as concepts that have subsequently been harnessed in the ideology of customary land ownership and in the ever-intensifying challenges to the legitimacy of the state in matters of land and resource rights.63

Conclusion

Taking as our point of departure the emerging critique of the crude and problematic treatment of scale in engagements with the concept of hybridity across the social sciences, most recently in critical perspectives on state-building interventions, we have sought here to extend this geographical critique by explicitly combining the sociospatial lenses of scale and territory in an analysis of the political economy of natural resource extraction in the Solomons Group of islands. Our overarching objective has been to explore what the concept of hybridity might contribute to our understanding of state-formation as an essentially organic, contingent, and highly contested process. We have focused on two spatial phenomena that lie at the core of the contentious politics of resource extraction in this archipelagic region: the social production of islands as a scale of struggle and the emergence of a pervasive ideology of customary landownership. In both cases, we have suggested that territoriality and the politics of scale provide critical insights into the contentious and frequently violent politics that have attended the advent and rapid growth of extractive resource economies. We have also suggested that hybridity’s crude spatial ontology is ill equipped to ‘see’ the processes of re-scaling and re-territorialisation that have characterised the political economy of resource extraction, let alone grapple with them. That said, we nevertheless recognise some heuristic value in hybridity perspectives because, in its ‘descriptive’ sense, hybridity can account for the dynamic socio-economic and socio-political forms that emerge in the context of these spatialised struggles and processes.

In light of these arguments, we conclude by sketching out some research agendas on state-formation in the ‘resource cursed’ nations of post-colonial Melanesia that, in turn, we hope might advance a more spatially enlightened critical hybridity project. First, as we noted at the outset, we have had to limit the scope of the sociospatial critique that
we have undertaken here by setting aside questions of place and networks, both of which are extremely rich terrains in Melanesian anthropology and geography. We would welcome further analysis of the nexus of resource extraction, violence, and state-formation that engages with these additional dimensions of social spatiality. Second, we invite research that explicitly examines the interaction between spatial re-ordering and hybrid governance in the context of the political economy of resource extraction, an agenda that is already well established in the African context.64

Finally, and related to the latter point, we would welcome investigations that extend the spatial analysis to the supranational and transnational scales. Again this an agenda that has been established in the context of extractive enclaves in Africa, where, for example, scholars have conceived of such enclaves as ‘transnationalised business spaces in which local, transnational and international actors engender a hybrid regime of security governance’ 65 Indeed, widening the lens from resource extraction to state-formation more broadly, we are struck by the extent to which sociospatial perspectives are yet to be applied to questions of sovereignty and political authority in contemporary post-colonial Melanesia. Perhaps, then, by combining spatial perspectives with those of the hybridity literature we might arrive at a research agenda that seeks to understand the ‘respacing’66 of Melanesia in the context of globalisation and ‘local’ histories and social relations.

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Notes

3. Dinnen and Allen, “Reflections on Hybridity as an Analytical Lens on State Formation.”
7. Berman and Lonsdale, Unhappy valley, 5
15. For example Hoene, “New Political Topographies”; Watts, “Resource Curse?”
27. Harvey, Spaces of Global Capitalism, 77.
30. Swyngedouw, “Neither Global Nor Local,” 140.
32. Agnew and Corbidge, Mastering Space.
34. Sack, Human Territoriality.
38. Harvey, Spaces of Global Capitalism, 91–92.
40. May, “Micronationalism.”
41. Allen, Greed and Grievance.
44. Craig and Porter, “Political Settlement in Solomon Islands.”
46. Filer, “The Bougainville Rebellion, the Mining Industry and the Process of Social Disintegration in Papua New Guinea.”
47. Laslett, State Crime on the Margins of Empire, 51–72.
49. Allen, “Islands, Extraction and Violence.”
53. Allen, Greed and Grievance.
54. Hall et al., Powers of Exclusion.
56. Dinnen and Allen, “Reflections on Hybridity as an Analytical Lens on State Formation.”
58. Ibid., 86.
61. Ibid., 155.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 157.
64. For example Hoenke, “New Political Topographies.”
65. Ibid., 4.
66. Engel and Nugent, Respacing Africa.

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